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ABSTRACT

The author argues the value of using both standardized tests and behavioral principles for the indepth diagnosis and remediation of reading disabilities. An illustrative case study is given in which analysis of test results was used to resolve conflicting appraisals of an 11-year-old girl's reading abilities, and behavioral management methods were used to remediate her weak skill areas. (DB)

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Using Tests as the Key to Diagnosis and Remediation of Reading Disabilities

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teach all children has moved in the direction of diagnostic-prescriptive teaching.

Although theorists and/or investigators can agree that this is a needed approach, they disagree on the theoretical basis for proceeding. Names well-known in the field of learning disabilities such as Bannatyne (1968), Frostig (1967), Johnson & Myklebust (1967), Kirk (1968) and McCarthy (1972) have advocated the identification of perceptual and/or psycholinguistic abilities or processes that are assumed by them to be essential to the learning of academic skills. In contrast the behavioristic approach or task analysis viewpoint has been advocated by others such as Bijou (1970), Gold (1968) and Mann (1971) who limit their remedial plan to observed behaviors.

Those who strive to identify the cause of the problem attempt to improve such general abilities as the reproduction of geometric designs, distinguishing between similar auditory stimuli, and walking a board among other perceptual, psycholinguistic or motoric abilities. This position is currently under question as empirical support for this approach does not seem to be available (Cohen, 1969; Ysseldyke, 1973).

In general, behaviorists are strongly anti-testing and use unstandardized techniques of observation. They focus their attention on the terminal behavior or designated goal. Tests have been important to those who search for the cause of the behavior. Both schools of thought have much to offer the

learning disabled child.

In beginning the search for the key to the learning disabled child's problem, it is this author's position that indepth diagnosis using standardized tests is invaluable. An idea can be obtained about the intellectual functioning level, emotional adjustment, and academic achievement level of the individual being studied. Further testing of areas that present a deviation from the normal is then in order with the final results pointing to the specific difficulty. Once this is known, comes the challenge of what to do about it. Here is where the behavioristic approach comes to the fore. By the time that learning disabled children are referred to consultants such as reading specialists or school psychologists their problems have been compounded by failure after failure. Much of the needed therapy is the increase of motivation and the development of an attitude for success. The following case history is a true illustration of how the two approaches to diagnostic-prescriptive teaching can be joined for rapid and lasting success.

Vicki was 10½ years old at the time of referral and had just completed the fifth grade. Although Vicki had managed to maintain a B average she had scored below the class mean on three areas of reading comprehension on the reading skills test that accompanied the fifth grade reader. The school recommended that she repeat the fifth reader for the second time, making a total of three times that she had gone over the same material. Both Vicki and her parents were quite

upset at this prospect and asked for help. They specifically wanted an idea about Vicki's intellectual functioning level in order to establish realistic expectations for her. They also hoped to find an answer to what was causing the difficulty if it were something other than insufficient intelligence.

A Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children (WISC) was administered and Vicki was found to have Average verbal abilities with Performance and Full Scale IQ scores falling in the Bright Normal range of intelligence. Information gleaned from an examination of test responses included that she had excellant ability to think abstractly with both verbal and nonverbal concept formation developed to a superior degree. Her understanding of the position of objects in space, which is important in understanding mathematical concepts, was also excellant. There were suggestions that Vicki was unenthusiastic about reading and that she tended to intellectualize and rationalize concerning her school-related difficulties. She was found to have a tendency to feel that the problem was with the school and/or others rather than within herself. There were indications that she could achieve at a higher level but was rebellious while trying to appear as conforming.

At this point, background information was sought to try to find why Vicki reacted to the academic situation as she did. Several pertinant facts were discovered. Vicki had been considered a problem reader by the teachers since she entered third grade. Her parents had hired a reading tutor the past two summers and the tutor insisted that Vicki was an

excellant reader. With the help of the tutor, she completed the fourth grade reader during the summer following the third grade. During her fourth year in school she was placed in the fifth grade reader. At the end of that year the decision was made by the teacher to have her repeat this work the following year. At the end of the fifth grade, she scored so low on the skills test that the school personnel said that she would have to be in the fifth grade reading group during the sixth grade also. This is the point at which referral to a psychologist was made.

By this point the parents had decided that the school personnel did not like their child and also that the teacher was too incompetant to tell, as a reading specialist could, that their daughter was an excellant reader. Vicki had discovered that she could depend on her parents to side with her every time a disagreement came up betwpen herself and the teacher. She no longer tried hard in school for the poorer her performance the more support from her parents.

Setting all psychological problems aside, the real problem seemed to be--why so much disagreement between the reading specialist and the teachers on how well Vicki read? A Peabody Individual Achievement Test was administered. Vicki scored below grade placement on General Information and on grade level 5.8 on Reading Comprehension (within the standard error of measure compared to grade placement of 5-10). The Iowa Silent Reading Test and the Gilmore Oral Reading Test were then administered.

On the Iowa Silent Reading Test she scored average or

above on Directed Reading, Word Meaning and Sentence Comprehension. She was slightly below average on Paragraph Comprehension, at the forty-second percentile on Reading Rate and at the fifth percentile on Comprehension of two paragraph articles. The results of the Gilmore Oral Reading Test revealed both Reading Comprehension and Potential Level of Comprehension at grade equivalent 6-5 with a Fast Reading Rate.

A comparison of the results of the two reading tests suggested that the reading specialist had conducted his sessions orally and indeed Vicki was an excellant reader when reading aloud. Most of the reading in schools is done silently and Vicki performed poorly on silent reading material that was similar in form to school tasks. The key to the problem appeared to be in the difference in the reading rates between silent and oral reading, for memory broke down as the selections grew in length and as reading time was lengthened.

Thanks to the availability of instruments for indepth testing, the direction for improving reading was clearly defined. Daily reading sessions were set up with the goal of the sessions being to increase reading comprehension to sixth grade level by increasing reading speed when reading silently. A behavior modification program using positive reinforcement was adopted. At the beginning of the training sessions, Vicki read an average of 225 words-per-minute with satisfactory comprehension at grade level 2.5. At the end of eighteen training sessions she read an average of 300 words-per-minute at grade level 6.4. She was retested by the

school, placed in sixth grade reading and made her first A in reading on her November report card.

This case demonstrates support for the group of theorists who look for the cause of the problem through the use of tests. It also supports the group of theorists who maintain that you only deal with observed behaviors. Success in this case came through both testing and dealing with observed behaviors. As helpers of children we cannot afford to become embroiled in differences of opinions between groups of theorists. If we are to help children, the most expediant way to do this is to use tests to pinpoint the problem and to then establish the goal of the desired behavior and work toward it using the tools of the behaviorist.

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